COASTAL COMMUNITIES

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Treeshelters in Louisiana Coastal Swamps: An Update

James A. Allen, National Biological Survey, Southern Science Center, 700 Cajundome Blvd., Lafayette, LA 70506; 318/266-8668; FAX 318/266-8592

In an earlier report (*R&MN* 9(2): 122-123), I described the value of using treeshelters to protect tree seedlings from nutria (*Myocaster coypus*). Applying the first-year results of our field trial and the experiences of Rudy Sparks, a local private land manager and tree planting contractor, we concluded that while nutria occasionally destroy seedlings within treeshelters, in most cases the shelters both protected the seedlings and enhanced their growth.

After three additional growing seasons, I returned to our site to observe the performance of the baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*) seedlings within their TUBEX-brand treeshelters. The results were generally encouraging. Only two of the 17 seedlings that survived the first growing season had died or could not be relocated. The remaining seedlings averaged 2.1 m (6.9 ft) in height and 2.7 cm (1 in) diameter at breast height. Mr. Sparks reports that the 12,000 seedlings he planted in treeshelters have not only survived but exhibited good growth after several growing seasons. The species he planted included baldcypress, Nuttall oak (*Quercus nuttallii*), water oak (*Q. nigra*), and persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*). As I reported in my previous note, none of the 36 unprotected seedlings in my small trial survived longer than 10 days. In larger plantings, nutria have destroyed as many as 500 unprotected seedlings virtually overnight. Clearly, treeshelters do protect seedlings from nutria along the Louisiana coastal zone.

One word of caution—restorationists working with fast-growing species should carefully inspect sheltered-trees for signs of damage and consider removing shelters rather than relying on them to decompose. At our trial site, I am concerned that several larger seedlings might girdle themselves as they begin pushing against the walls of the tubes. Larry King, of Treessentials in St. Paul, Minnesota, recommends that treeshelter users should annually inspect their shelters and remove them when the base of the tree reaches approximately 7.5 cm (3 in). However, he also warns against removing treeshelters too soon—before the sapling can withstand strong winds or when the shelter is still necessary for protection from girdling by rodents or antler scraping by deer.